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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PROP](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: TIANANMEN: JUNE 4 MEMORIES REMAIN FRESH FOR
TWENTY-SOMETHING YOUTH, DISSIDENTS, AND THE PARTY, DESPITE
CENSORSHIP

REF: A. BEIJING 400
[1](#)B. BEIJING 1249

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Classified By: Political Internal Unit Chief
Dan Kritenbrink. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Twenty years on, the June 4, 1989 violent crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators continues to have a powerful impact on Chinese society and politics, despite the fact that the event remains a taboo subject, according to a range of Embassy contacts. The Party has reportedly created a special June 4 working group to ensure that the anniversary passes "smoothly." Although local Party officials are warning about the potential for unrest, and activists plan to commemorate the day by wearing white, most Embassy contacts believe tight security will make any significant public protest or commemoration impossible. Groups of parents of students killed in the crackdown and of liberal academics, however, each managed to hold small gatherings in Beijing earlier this month. On the Internet, people are using euphemisms for June 4, such as "May 35," to engage in limited discussion of the anniversary, and students have demonstrated a surprisingly high level of knowledge about Tiananmen. Though many still give the Party credit for two decades of rapid growth, several contacts believe that the vast majority of people, both inside and outside the Party, think the use of deadly force on June 4 was a mistake. Nonetheless, contacts predicted the Party would not revisit its verdict on June 4 anytime soon and would only dare "reopen" the "Pandora's box" of Tiananmen once more time passes and China grows more stable. End Summary.

THE 1989 "POLITICAL DISTURBANCE"

[1](#)2. (C) Twenty years on, the June 4, 1989 violent crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators continues to have a powerful impact on Chinese society and politics, despite the fact that the event remains a taboo subject, according to a range of Embassy contacts. Public mention of the June 4 massacre is extremely rare in China today. When occasional references are made to the event in the media or in official settings, the crackdown is almost always referred to as the 1989 "political disturbance" (zhengzhi fengbo). Typing this term

into the popular (and heavily censored) Chinese search engine Baidu will bring up links to the terse official PRC versions of Tiananmen (i.e., that a small group of "counterrevolutionaries" hijacked the student movement in an attempt to "overthrow" the Communist Party), but no recent articles. PRC media have been silent on the upcoming 20th anniversary. One of the only places in Beijing where one can see public reference to June 4 is the Beijing Police Museum, where a memorial to fallen police officers includes remembrances for several who lost their lives during the "disturbance" of 1989.

PARTY LEADERSHIP WORKING TO ENSURE SMOOTH JUNE 4

13. (C) Maintenance of stability during the 20th anniversary of June 4, one of the most sensitive anniversaries in a year full of important historical dates for China (ref A), is a top priority for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The central leadership has formed a special June 4 "leadership small group" that is meeting frequently to ensure no major incidents or commemorations related to June 4 take place, according to Chen Jieren (protect), nephew of Politburo Standing Committee Member He Guoqiang and News Director at Youth.cn, a news website operated by the Communist Youth League. Chen told PolOffs May 13 that Internet censorship related to the anniversary was very intense. For example, a recent blog posting urging motorists to turn on their headlights on June 4 was quickly censored.

14. (C) Although discussion of June 4 in the media

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and on the Internet has been sharply curtailed, the topic has been mentioned frequently in internal Party and Government meetings this year. The week of May 18, PolOffs, using directed Google searches with the key word "political disturbance" and ".gov.cn" addresses, were able to download numerous internal Party speeches and documents warning of the "dangers" posed by the June 4 anniversary. For example, a document issued by the Party Committee of Rongshui Miao Autonomous County in Guangxi to township-level cadres warned that "hostile domestic and foreign forces" would engage in a "new round of subversion" in 2009 and listed the Tiananmen anniversary as a key stability challenge during the April-to-July period. PolOffs found similar references to June 4 in internal speeches by local leaders in Jiangsu, Jiangxi, and Zhejiang provinces, among other places. (Note: PolOffs have found that governments at the district and township levels -- the lowest in China's governing structure -- tend to be more lax about what they save on their open web servers.)

WEARING WHITE THE ONLY WAY TO PROTEST?

15. (C) None of our sources predicted that any significant protests or public events would take place June 4 due to extremely tight security, although they did not rule out the possibility of "isolated incidents." Wu Jiexiang (protect), a former CCP General Office official and advisor to late General Secretary Zhao Ziyang who was jailed following the crackdown, told PolOffs May 18 that "nothing is going to happen" on June 4. The more sensitive the date, Wu observed, the more "stable" China becomes as security services clamp down on any perceived source of unrest. Guo Yushan (protect), the founder of the pro-reform private think tank the

Transition Institute, said he and other activists at the Institute had already received warnings from state security agents to refrain from any commemoration. Guo said he and his friends would wear white June 4 but otherwise had no plans for additional action. Other Embassy contacts, including some journalists, have also told us they intend to wear white on June 4 as a way to commemorate the date (ref B).

GRIEVING PARENTS HOLD MEMORIAL

¶6. (C) Although Embassy contacts predicted that no Tiananmen-related meetings would be allowed on the anniversary itself, two significant commemorations have already taken place. On May 17, as many as 50 parents whose children were killed in the 1989 crackdown attended a memorial service in Beijing, according to the South China Morning Post and the Hong Kong-based Information Centre for Human Rights and Democracy. The Ministry of State Security reportedly allowed the service to take place provided it remain low-key and indoors. However, security agents, the report said, confined Ding Zilin, the founder of Tiananmen Mothers, to her home to prevent her from attending. The second event was a small conference on the "June 4 Democracy Movement" that took place in Beijing May 10 and was attended by 19 academics, including liberal scholars from Tsinghua University and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

REMEMBERING "MAY 35"

¶7. (C) Despite intensifying web censorship as the anniversary approaches, there has been significant discussion of Tiananmen-related topics online. Blogger Zhao Jin (protect), widely known by his pen name "Michael Anti," told PolOff May 19 that to fool censors, some Chinese Internet users had adopted the term "May 35th" as a euphemism for June 4. (Note: A recent search of fanfou.com, a Chinese copy of Twitter, revealed 15 posts mentioning May 35.) Zhang Dongchen (protect), an aide to Baidu CEO Li Yanhong (Robin Li), told PolOff May 12 that, while online discussion of June 4 was difficult, Internet debate about the mistakes and accomplishments of late CCP General Secretary Zhao Ziyang was somewhat

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easier and served as a proxy for discussion of June 4. (Note: Zhang made these comments a week before the news broke of the publication of Zhao Ziyang's memoirs, which has led to intense online censorship of any article mentioning the new book. Zhao Jin, however, said news of the Zhao Ziyang memoir was spreading quickly in China via Twitter, which authorities have less ability to control.)

NOT-SO-IGNORANT TWENTY-SOMETHINGS

¶8. (C) Recent discussions with university students and other Chinese in their 20s and early 30s revealed a widespread awareness of June 4, with some having highly detailed knowledge of the events of 20 years ago. Those who were small children in 1989 carried vivid memories of those events. Baidu's Zhang Dongchen, for example, was 12 in 1989. In the weeks prior to the crackdown, Dong's family moved from central Beijing to the city's outskirts. Dong said he remembered clearly the People's Liberation Army (PLA) barracks that were located within sight of their temporary home and how, as June 4

approached, university demonstrators arrived to block the gate of the barracks to prevent the soldiers from exiting. Another Beijing native, Lin Yuzhe (protect), who was seven in 1989, remembered the crackdown because a tank was parked outside her family's courtyard for one month after June 4. Li Xiang (protect), a native of Inner Mongolia born in 1982, said Tiananmen was "the most terrifying event of her childhood." Although, unlike Zhang and Lin, Li did not personally witness any protests or violence, she told PolOff May 15 that graphic, post-crackdown television coverage (used by authorities to dramatize the crimes of the "counterrevolutionaries") remained seared in her memory. Li, who now lives in Beijing, told PolOff that with the 20th anniversary quickly approaching, June 4 had become a frequent discussion topic among her friends, most of whom are well educated but apolitical Chinese in their 20s working in the public relations and fashion industries.

THE POWER OF PIRACY

19. (C) Young people with whom we spoke credited the Internet for giving them access to information about June 4. The blogger Zhao Jin told PolOff that he first learned "the truth" about Tiananmen in 1999 when he watched a videotape of the 1995 documentary "Gate of Heavenly Peace" that a friend had smuggled in from Hong Kong. Zhao estimated that "at least one million" Chinese had surreptitiously watched the film, which is available via peer-to-peer downloading on the Internet. Liao Zhimin (protect), a law student at Peking University, told PolOff May 20 that, while he remembered watching television images of the crackdown in 1989 from his hometown in Sichuan Province, he only had a vague understanding of events until he arrived at Peking University (PKU) in 2001. At PKU, Liao said he watched an "American documentary that was several hours long" that described the use of the PLA to crush the demonstrations. (Note: Though Liao could not remember the film's title, based on his description, it was almost certainly Gate of Heavenly Peace.) Zhao Jin stated that the documentary had both "a good and bad influence" in China. On the one hand, the film taught a generation of Chinese about the "abc's" of June 4, but in Zhao's opinion, the documentary unfairly placed much of blame on the student leaders, particularly Chai Ling, because of their unwillingness to compromise to avoid violence. Liao, however, said such information has been harder to find in the last two years, following a move by PKU to eliminate sensitive content on school Intranet sites. Chen Zirui (protect), a recent law graduate from Tsinghua University, claimed that he and his friends "all know the truth about Tiananmen" based on Internet information they accessed at Tsinghua.

10. (C) Aside from the Internet, our contacts cited family and teachers as the second most common sources for information about the student movement. Liao's wife, Chen Xiaofang (protect), a first-year

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Ph.D. student at Renmin University who was born in 1982, said she had no personal recollection of 1989. Like Liao, she grew up in Leshan, Sichuan Province. Chen said she nevertheless learned about Tiananmen from her school teachers, several of whom had been involved in the student movement in Beijing and Shanghai and were then "sent down" to teaching jobs in Leshan upon graduation.

¶11. (C) Embassy contacts varied in their estimates for the number of university students who have heard about the Tiananmen crackdown. Most nonetheless agreed that only a minority fully understand the events of 1989, especially the fact that the PLA opened fire on unarmed civilians. Chen Ziming (protect), an economist the Chinese government designated as one of the "black hands" behind the 1989 student movement and who afterward was sentenced to 13 years in prison, told PolOff May 16 that 90 percent of students know that "six four" (liusi, the colloquial term for the June 4 crackdown) was a "big event" involving student protests. Only 10 percent of those with some knowledge of Tiananmen, however, know the "full details," Chen said. Chen noted that his nephew, now an undergraduate student in the United States, was completely ignorant of June 4, much less Chen's own involvement, until he traveled abroad. Chen's sister-in-law forbade him from speaking about Tiananmen with the nephew for fear of "harming his prospects" in China. Now that the nephew is in the United States, Chen said, he e-mails constantly with questions about 1989. The Transition Institute's Guo Yushan gave a similar assessment: a large majority of students know about "six four" and as many as 20-30 percent were aware of the more sensitive details. Guo credited the Internet for a steady improvement in young people's knowledge of June 4. Journalist Chen Jieren, however, gave a bleaker assessment, saying that only two to three percent of university-aged Chinese have a "comprehensive understanding" of June 4. The United States "must help China remember Tiananmen," Chen said, because knowledge of the events was still so limited among students.

¶12. (C) The Party, by covering up the worst aspects of the crackdown (i.e., the use of deadly force by the PLA) and emphasizing China's economic achievements of the last two decades, had been successful in shaping popular opinion regarding Tiananmen, contacts universally agreed. Chen Ziming said that while few young people agreed with the official line that the crackdown was fully justified, most accept the argument that "the success of the last 20 years partly makes up for what happened." Recent discussions with three middle-aged Beijingers, all of whom immigrated to the United States or Canada after Tiananmen but have since returned to do business and research in China, revealed conflicted feelings about June 4. Vivian Wu (protect), who participated in the 1989 demonstrations, told PolOff she wondered if China would be as stable and prosperous as it is today "if the students had gotten their way." Another returnee, Zhang Shengyu (protect), made a similar point, saying the use of force was "inexcusable" but that most people of his generation put a premium on stability and do not have strong feelings about the anniversary. "Tiananmen is simply a historical fact," he said. Winnie Lao (protect), however, the niece of a high-level CCP official who grew up in the Zhongnanhai leadership compound, said Beijingers are still "very, very angry" about Tiananmen, though they are forced to keep these feelings "inside." "What kind of Party opens fire on its own youth?" she said.

LIFE OF A TIANANMEN "BLACK HAND"

¶13. (C) Despite the leadership's obsession with maintaining order surrounding the June 4 anniversary, Tiananmen "black hand" Chen Ziming, who

spent a total of six years in prison in the 1990s and was eventually allowed to serve the bulk of his

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13-year sentence while confined to his apartment, told PolOff he has enjoyed increasing freedom since 2006. Chen was allowed to take his first international trip, to Australia, in 2008. Ministry of State Security (MSS) agents nevertheless continue to monitor his home 24 hours per day and have rented an apartment across from Chen's residence on the northern outskirts of Beijing. (Note: Curiously, the MSS also keeps guard over Chen's former residence in central Beijing even though Chen and his wife have not lived there for years and now rent the property out. The MSS explained to him that they must watch his old apartment so long as the property remains in his name. Not only does this show the bureaucratic inertia of the state security apparatus, Chen said, but such "blatant waste" also shows they have huge resources at their disposal.) Starting in 2006, these agents no longer follow him at all times, which has made friends and former colleagues more comfortable about meeting with him. Chen said he is able to publish in Mainland media under a variety of pen names. The May issue of Yanhuang Chunqiu, an outspoken history journal run by retired reformist leaders, includes an article by Chen Ziming about the origins of Chinese nationalism under the pseudonym "Ziming." Ziming is such a common given name in China, he said, that editors have plausible deniability should propaganda authorities investigate.

WILL THE PARTY EVER REVERSE THE JUNE 4 VERDICT?

14. (C) The Communist Party will eventually revisit the verdict on Tiananmen, but for now the issue is simply too sensitive, according to Embassy contacts. Chen Ziming told PolOff a reassessment of Tiananmen would not take place for "at least five years, but probably not for ten or more." Chen described a recent meeting he had with a "bureau-level official" (juzhang ji) from Hunan Province. The official, according to Chen, stated that "95 percent" of CCP rank and file in Hunan Province believe June 4 was a "mistake" and want to see the official verdict reversed and Zhao Ziyang and other dismissed officials exonerated. A real review of June 4, however, could only take place once former Premier Li Peng and former CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin pass away. Wu Jiaying (protect), the one-time Zhao Ziyang advisor, similarly said it would take a "very long time" for the Party to reevaluate Tiananmen. Wu similarly asserted that "over 90 percent" of Chinese think June 4 was a mistake -- or at least that the use of the military was wrong -- but nobody in the Party has the standing to challenge either Deng Xiaoping's decision to crack down or the official justification that Deng created.

FEAR OF OPENING A "PANDORA'S BOX"

15. (C) Party-member contacts likewise commented on the difficulty of reexamining Tiananmen in the short term. Xue Fukang (protect), Vice Chairman of the Central Party School-affiliated China Reform Forum and a former editor of the CCP Central Committee newspaper Guangming Ribao, said June 4 is "still an extremely difficult issue for the Party to handle." "Reopening" Tiananmen would raise many difficult issues, such as who should be held responsible, who should be compensated, and who ultimately gave the orders allowing the military to open fire. There

remain "different opinions" within the Party about June 4, Xue said, with influential elders like Mao Zedong's former secretary Li Rui and former People's Daily editor Hu Jiwei continuing to criticize the decision to use force against demonstrators. Moreover, Xue said some PLA military commanders who refused orders to march their troops into Tiananmen were also among the "internal critics" who did not accept the official assessment. The PRC leadership, Xue indicated, would eventually deal with the Tiananmen problem, but doing so would take time. Only through the passage of time, and once China is more stable, could the "Pandora's box" of Tiananmen be reopened.

"ZHAO ZIYANG WAS A GOOD MAN"

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¶16. (C) Further demonstrating that support remains within the Party for ousted General Secretary Zhao Ziyang, another China Reform Forum scholar, Vice Chairman Ding Kuisong (protect), told PolOff May 18 that Zhao Ziyang was "a good man" who made "tremendous contributions" to China's reform and development. Ding, who said he had heard about the upcoming publication of Zhao's secret memoirs, commented that it "was a pity" that Zhao was sacked as Party General Secretary as a result of "political struggles" at the top of the Party over the student movement. Reflecting on what the events of 1989 meant for China today, Ding said that no one in China wanted to see "chaos" and that China cannot change quickly or radically. The great progress of the past 30 years showed that China's direction had been "correct," despite the "unfortunate" events of ¶1989. Ding did not offer a prediction for whether or when the Party would revisit Tiananmen, saying only that further democratic reform and opening was "inevitable." Politically, Ding asserted, there was much more space today than there was in 1989, and the leadership should get credit for establishing a more stable, rule-based politics. Ding nonetheless expressed some worry that a "minority" within China, such as the "New Left," might attempt to "reverse course." In conclusion, however, Ding averred that the past two decades have demonstrated that, despite the violent crackdown in 1989, gradual democratic reform remained China's "only way forward."

WEINSTEIN